A DISCOURSE ABOUT A Scrupulous Conscience,

PREACHED

At the Parish-Church of St. *Mary Aldermanbury, London.*

By *Benjamin Calamy*, D. D. One of His Majesties Chaplains in Ordinary.

Consider this, 'tis the Judgment of some, that thousands are gone to Hell, and ten thousands upon their march thither, that in all probability had never come there, if they had not been tempted from the Parish Churches, for the enjoyment of Communion in a purer Church. Mr. Baxter's Ep. to separate Congr.

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A DISCOURSE ABOUT Syphilis Contracted

Printed for Benjamin Alsop, at the Middle Temple Gate in Fleet-street.

TO

Sr. George Jeffryes,

Knight and Baronet,

Chief Juſtice of *CHESTER*.

SIR,

THough I could not eaſily perſwade my ſelf to expoſe this following Sermon to publick view, yet after I was once reſolved to venture it abroad, I was ſoon determined to whom I ought to preſent it. To your Intereſt and Favour I chiefly owe my being placed in this Pariſh, to your Countenance my greateſt Encouragement here, and if it may gain your Acceptance and Approbation, I ſhall but little value the uncertain Judgment of others.

Upon how many this plain homely Diſcourſe may have good effect, I cannot gheſs; how many it will anger and diſpleaſe I am not at all concerned: and tho I may be thought by ſome ill advis'd in publiſhing ſuch a Sermon, yet every one will commend and juſtifie my Diſcretion in prefixing your Name before it: for ſo great an awe have the Enemies of our Church and Government of your Loyalty and Fidelity to both, of your undaunted Zeal and Activity for the Service of both, that they will not dare loudly to condemn what you are pleaſed to protect. They will be juſtly afraid of quarrelling with me, when they know I have engaged you on my ſide.

I am very ſenſible, that in this Age we live ſome are ſo extraordinarily wiſe and wary, as to cenſure and diſcourage all Men that ſpeak roundly and act vigorouſly for the King and Church, as being more

more forward and buſie than is needful: but I am alſo as ſenſible, that if ſome Men had not ſhewn more Courage and Honeſty than thoſe prudent Perſons, both would have been by this time in far greater danger, than at this preſent, Thanks be to God, they are.

For my own part, no one is more favourable to a truly tender Conſcience than my ſelf, let it be as nice and ſcrupulous as it can well be, ſo it be about the ſubſtantial matters of Piety towards God, Juſtice between Man and Man, due Obedience to Superiours, and when it makes us more exactly careful of our undoubted Duty in all Inſtances: But, when Men are ſcrupulous only on one ſide, about things commanded by lawful Authority, and make no Scruple of Diſobedience, Schiſm, Faction, and Diviſion; when Men ſet up their private Humour, Fancy, or Opinion, in oppoſition to eſtabliſhed Laws,

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when they become peeviſh, pragmatical, and ungovernable; nay, when Mens Conſciences prove ſo generally tender and ſcrupulous, as to doubt of and ſuſpect the Rights of the Crown, (for that Conſcience that is ſo tender againſt the Church is alſo uſually as tender againſt the King) ſuch wayward skittiſh Conſciences ought to be well bridled and reſtrained, or elſe they will be not only intolerably troubleſome, but extreamly miſchievous both to Church and State.

That the Bleſſed Rewards of Vertue and Loyalty may plentifully deſcend upon your Self, and all that belong to you, both in this Life and that which is to come, is the earneſt Prayer of

Honoured Sir,

Your moſt humble and
moſt obliged Servant,

Benjamin Calamy.

St. Luke 11. 41.

But rather give Alms of ſuch things as you have; and behold, all things are clean unto you.

THE occaſion of theſe Words was this. Whilſt our Bleſſed Saviour was after his wonted manner inſtructing the People, a certain *Phariſee*, either in ſome meaſure pleaſed with his Diſcourſe, or elſe that he might catch an advantage againſt him, beſought him to dine with him. Our Lord, who refuſed no fair opportunity of doing good, would not diſdain to go to the Houſes, either of the greateſt Sinners, or his moſt deadly Enemies; would converſe familiarly with them, and eat at their Tables, that by ſuch obliging condeſcenſion he might by degrees win them to the love and embracing of Divine truth. He was the great Phyſician of Souls, and went about continually viſiting his Patients, all thoſe whoſe Minds ſtood in need of his help or cure. He conſulted their Benefit more than his own Safety or Reputation. He would keep company with Publicanes and Sinners, in order to the reforming of them, tho he himſelf for doing ſo ſhould be thought one of them; and he frankly accepted the invitation of Phariſees, tho he knew they lay in wait for him, and deſign'd only to intrap him.

He went in therefore with the Phariſee into his Houſe, and without any of thoſe previous Waſhings and Purifications, which the *Jews* religiouſly uſed before eating, he

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ſat down to meat. This the ſtrict Phariſee thought a great Prophaneneſs and Wickedneſs in his Gueſt. He wondred that ſo great a Prophet and Preacher of Righteouſneſs as our Saviour pretended to be, ſhould ſo ſcandalouſly violate the Traditions of the Elders, *verſe* 38. *And when the Phariſee ſaw it, he marvelled that he had not firſt waſhed before Dinner:* for as St. *Mark* tells us upon a like occaſion, Mark 7. 3. *The Phariſees, and all the Jews, except they waſh their hands, eat not, holding the Tradition of the Elders. And when they come from the Market, except they waſh, they eat not. And many other things there be which they have received to hold, as the waſhing of Cups, and of Pots, and of braſen Veſſels, and of Tables.* Things not ordained by God, nor any part of *Moſes*'s Laws, but the rules and preſcriptions of their Rabbies or Scribes; obſerved, at leaſt by the ſtricteſt part of the Jews, out of an Opinion that true purity of mind was to be obtain'd and preſerved by ſuch frequent waſhings. For of ſuch neceſſity did they think theſe outward Purgations to be, that it was a determined caſe amongſt them, that if any one in great diſtreſs had Water ſufficient for waſhing, but not enough to waſh and drink too, he ought rather to periſh by Thirſt than neglect to waſh himſelf; and it was commonly ſaid amongſt them, that to eat with unwaſhen hands was a greater Pollution, than to defile ones Body with an Harlot.

Now this our Saviour with great zeal reproves in the Phariſees, in the Verſes before my Text, *Now do ye Phariſees make clean the out-ſide of the Cup and Platter, but your inward part is full of ravening and Wickedneſs. Ye Fools, did not he that made that which is without make that which is within alſo?* That is to ſay, that which God regards is the purity of your Minds, the cleanſing your Hearts from all evil affections and filthy luſts; and all your outward waſhings, without this internal purity, are but as if a man ſhould waſh his Veſſels, the out-ſide of them only, leaving the in-

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ſide of them full of all filthineſs and naſtineſs. Thus do ye Phariſees waſh your Bodies, whilſt your Souls and Spirits remain full of all Uncleanneſs, of Malice, and Wickedneſs. If you would obey and pleaſe God, you muſt cleanſe that which is within as well as that which is without: then he adds the Words of my *Text*, *But rather give Alms of ſuch things as you have; and behold, all things are clean unto you.*

There are ſeveral Meanings given of theſe Words by Interpreters, with which I ſhall not now trouble you, but only propound that which I ſhall chooſe to inſiſt upon. It is very ordinary in Scripture to expreſs the whole of our Duty or Religion by ſome one part or eminent Inſtance of it; as very frequently by Charity, ſo here by one principal part of Charity, giving of Alms. So that the Senſe ought not to be reſtrained to this ſingle duty of Alms-giving, to the excluſion of the reſt; but all other Duties, that are of the ſame weight and neceſſity, are here underſtood, as well as that one which is mentioned. And then the Senſe is this, Mind chiefly the great, and moral, and ſubſtantial parts of Gods Laws, ſtudy thoſe Duties that are of eternal and indiſpenſable Obligation, be moſt zealous and ſollicitous for the matters of Piety, Righteouſneſs, and Charity, and *behold all things are clean unto you*; that is, ye need not then be ſo anxious or concerned about theſe little things, nor ſo ſtrictly tye up your ſelves to ſuch Formalities and external Rites. If you be but ſeriouſly diligent about your main and undoubted Duty, you will be more indifferent about Meats and Drinks, nor will you lay ſo great a ſtreſs upon any Singularities or Affectations in Religion. Be but exactly careful to avoid every thing which God hath forbid, to do every thing which he hath expreſly commanded, and then trouble not your Conſciences about eating with unwaſhen hands. Thus, as *Grotius* upon theſe Words obſerveth, they ſignifie the ſame with what St. *Paul* ſaith, *Titus* 1. 15. *Unto the pure all things are*

pure.

pure. They who keep themselves unspotted from all sinful Pollutions, who strictly abstain from unlawful Freedoms, may with a safe Conscience use any unlawful Liberty, and eat any kind of meats, with washen or unwashen hands.

In short, the sense of the Words seemeth to be this; Mind your plain and necessary Duty, and trouble not your selves with Scruples about little and indifferent things. Whence I shall take occasion to discourse of what is usually called a scrupulous Conscience: which I have chosen to do, not out of a design to expose or upbraid the weakness of any, but rather charitably to contribute what I can towards the healing and curing of it: and this I take for granted, That we cannot do greater Service either to the Church of Christ or Souls of Men, than by all prudent means to root out those needless scruples out of their minds, which hath been the occasion of such unchristian Separations and dangerous Divisions amongst us, at first begun, and still maintained generally upon the account of such things, as I verily believe a well instructed Conscience need not be concerned or disturbed about.

I shall first shew you what I understand by a scrupulous Conscience, then observe some few things concerning it, and lastly, offer some plain Rules and Means by which we may best get rid of it.

First, What is a scrupulous Conscience? Now Conscience, as it is a Rule of our Actions, is nothing else, but a Man's Mind or Judgment concerning the moral Goodness or Evil, Lawfulness or Unlawfulness of things; and as this Judgment is either true or false, so is our Conscience either good and well grounded, or erroneous, The Divine Law made known to us either by the Light of Nature, or plain Scripture, or direct consequence from it, such as any honest man may understand, is the rule of Conscience, or of that Judgment we make of the Lawfulness or Unlawfulness of things. So that our Conscience

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is a ſafe Rule and Guide of our Actions no farther than as it ſelf is directed and warranted by the Law of God.

1. A good and well grounded Conſcience is, when we carefully abſtain from whatever God hath forbidden, don't neglect doing any thing which he hath commanded, and as for other matters left indifferent and at Liberty, we do them or forbear doing of them according as the Rules of obedience to Superiours, Prudence, and Charity, do require. This is the Health and ſound State of the Mind.

2. An erroneous Conſcience is, when we judge that to be evil or unneceſſary which God hath expreſly commanded, and is our Duty; or that to be good and neceſſary which he hath plainly forbid, and is really ſinful. Now our Conſciences cannot alter the nature of things: that which is our Duty remaineth ſo, and we ſin by omitting it, notwithſtanding we in our Conſciences think it unlawful to be done; and what is really Evil continueth ſuch, and is Sin in us, however our Conſciences tell us it is our duty to do it: and the fault is more or leſs compaſſionable and pardonable, as the cauſes of the Error are more or leſs voluntary and avoidable. This is a grievous Diſeaſe and deadly Sickneſs of the Mind, when we thus groſsly err in our Judgments, and act according to our miſtaken Opinion of things.

3. A ſcrupulous Conſcience is converſant about things in their own Nature indifferent, and it conſiſts

Either in ſtrictly tying up our ſelves to ſome things which God hath no where commanded; as the *Phariſees* made great Conſcience of waſhing before they did eat, and abundance of other unneceſſary Rites and Uſages they had of Mens own inventing and deviſing, which they as religiouſly, nay more carefully obſerved than the indiſputable Commands of God himſelf:

Or in a conſcientious abſtaining from ſome things which are not forbid, nor any ways unlawful. *Touch not, taſte not,*

not, handle not, doubting and fearing where no fear is, thinking that they ſhould as much offend God by eating ſome kind of Meats, wearing ſome Garments, as they ſhould do were they guilty of Murder and Adultery. Which is the caſe of many amongſt us, who by ſuch Scrupuloſity about little matters ſeem more preciſe and auſtere than other good and honeſt Chriſtians are, or themſelves need or ought to be.

Far be it from me, by any thing I ſhall now ſay, to diſcourage the greateſt and tendereſt care any Chriſtian can take to keep himſelf from all Sin, from all Occaſions and Temptations to it, from the leaſt appearance of Evil, of what is really ſuch: and to do any thing that is in it ſelf ſinful, out of confidence that it is lawful, is far worſe and a more grievous offence than to abſtain from many things which are truly lawful, out of an Opinion that they are ſinful. Notwithſtanding this, I cannot but reckon it the chief Policy of the Devil, the grand Enemy of all that is good, when he cannot perſuade us that there is nothing at all ſinful or unlawful, then to make us ſuſpect every thing for ſuch, or at leaſt, that there is great danger of diſpleaſing God by the moſt indifferent and innocent Actions; by theſe means enſnaring and entangling Mens Conſciences, and rendring Religion a moſt troubleſome burden to them.

A ſcrupulous Conſcience therefore ſtarts and boggles, where there is no real Evil or Miſchief; is afraid of omitting or doing what may be omitted or done without Sin. Which I know not how better to illuſtrate than by thoſe unaccountable Antipathies or Prejudices that ſome men have againſt ſome ſort of Meats, or living Creatures, which have not the leaſt harm or hurt in them, yet are ſo offenſive and dreadful to ſuch Perſons, that they fly from them as they would from a Tyger or Bear, and avoid them as they would do the Plague or Poyſon. Juſt thus do ſome Men run out of

of the Church at the ſight of a Surplice, as if they had been ſcared by the apparition of a Ghoſt.

I. proceed to the ſecond thing I propounded, to obſerve to you ſome few general things concerning this ſcrupulous Conſcience; as,

1. That this is a very ſickly, crazy temper of mind, a great indiſpoſition, a ſtate of weakneſs and infirmity. It ariſeth from Ignorance and want of right underſtanding our Religion, from undue timerouſneſs or unſetledneſs of mind, from melancholy, or unreaſonable prejudices and miſtakes about the nature of things. Such ſcrupulous Perſons are like fearful Women, that wander in the dark, who ſeeing nothing to affright them, yet fancy many things, which make them tremble every ſtep they take: or like thoſe who ſee only by an uncertain glimmering twilight, their Imagination once abus'd and prepoſſeſs'd, transforms every Object into a Monſter or Gyant.

Thus this Scrupulous is the ſame with what in other Words ſome call a tender Conſcience, ſo tender that every thing hurts and wounds it, like a tender Eye which the leaſt Duſt or Smoak grievouſly offends, or a tender conſtitution of Body, which the leaſt Air or Wind mightily diſorders and diſcompoſes. Now this is far from being any Vertue or Commendation in us, this is no deſirable Qualification, nor a matter of Ambition to be thought men of ſuch tender Conſciences, no more than it is for a man's Reputation to be ſickly and often indiſpos'd. A good Conſcience is firm and ſteady, well ſetled and reſolved, and ſuch needleſs Scruples about things lawful are at the beſt a ſign of an ungovern'd Fancy, and a weak Judgment. As the niceneſs and ſqueamiſhneſs of a mans Stomach that diſtaſts wholſom Food is a ſimptom of an unſound and unhealthy Body. This doth not argue any extraordinary holineſs or purity above others, as the Phariſee conceited of himſelf, *ſtand off, come not nigh me, touch me not, for I am holier*

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than than, becauſe he waſhed himſelf ſo often. No, we are yet in a childiſh ſtate, and whilſt we are frighted with ſuch Bug-bears and Phantaſms, we have not yet arrived to the Underſtanding or Reſolution of a Man.

2. This Scrupuloſity about little matters may be, and is often a ſign of Hypocriſie. I take not upon my ſelf to judge any Perſons. Let every man look to himſelf; but thus certainly it was with the Scribes and Phariſees of old; They ſtrained at every Gnat, ſtumbled at every Straw, would ſtarve ſooner than eat their Meat with defiled hands, would not for the World wrong a man of a Cummin-ſeed, or a ſpear of Mint, and by this wonderful exactneſs and ſtrictneſs in ſome inſtances, they eaſily gained the Reputation of the greateſt Saints; ſo that it is ſaid to have been an ordinary Proverb among the Jews, *That if but two perſons in the World went to Heaven, one of them would be a Scribe the other a Phariſee.* Yet for all this, if we will believe our Saviour's account of them, they made nothing of ſwallowing Camels, living in the greateſt and moſt known Wickedneſs.

Alas! their Conſciences would not give them leave to enter into the Governours Hall to go amongſt the Heathens, for fear of being polluted by them, yet at the ſame time they ſtuck not at ſuborning falſe Witneſſes againſt the beſt and moſt innocent Perſon that ever lived. They blamed the Diſciples for plucking the ears of Corn on the Sabbath-day, as if they, poor tender-hearted men, were offended and grieved to the Soul at ſuch Prophaneneſs, and yet they thought it nothing to deny relief and ſuccour to their own Parents when in Want or Diſtreſs; they made no Bones of Rapine and Extortion, oppreſſing the Poor, or devouring Widows Houſes. By their curioſity about theſe external Obſervances, they hoped to make amends for their groſs Tranſgreſſions in other caſes of far greater weight and moment. Since they denied themſelves many things which God

God had allow'd them, they hop'd he would readily forgive them, tho in some other things they took a greater Liberty than he had permitted them.

Had any of us been present when *Mary*, St. *John* 12. 3. took the Ointment of Spikenard, very costly, and anointed the Feet of Jesus, and had heard *Judas*'s Rebuke, *Why was not this Ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the Poor?* (He scrupled such a profuse expence, tho about our Saviour himself. He thought it might have been better employ'd, to more useful purposes.) Should we not from this have strait concluded him the most charitable and conscientious of all Christ's Disciples, and yet this over-great care for the Poor was only a pretence and covering for his theevish Intention.

They therefore who are so scrupulous about little indifferent matters, ought to approve their Honesty and Sincerity by the most accurate Diligence in the Practise of all other Duties of Religion, which are plainly and undoubtedly such. They who pretend to such a tender Conscience above other Men must know, that the World will watch them as to the fairness and justice of their Dealings, the calmness of their Tempers, their behaviour in their several Relations, their Modesty, Humility, Charity, Peaceableness, and the like. If in all these things they keep the same Tenor, use the same caution and circumspection, and be uniformly conscientious, then it must be acknowledged, that it is only Weakness or Ignorance that raiseth their Scruples, not any vicious Principles, and the condition of those who are under the power of such Scruples, is much to be commiserated.

But, when I see a Man scrupling praying by a Book or Form, and yet living without any Sense of God or Fear of him, afraid of a Ceremony in God's Worship, and not afraid of a plain damnable Sin, of Covetousness, rash censuring his Brethren, of Hatred and Strife, Faction and Schism,

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and disobedience to Superiours; when I see one that out of Conscience refuseth to kneel at the Sacrament, and yet dares totally neglect the Communion; who takes great care not to give offence to his weak Brother, but can freely speak evil of Dignities, and despiseth his lawful Governours; it is not then uncharitable to say, That it is not dread of displeasing God, but some other bye end or interest that acts and moves such a Person, and in pleading the Tenderness of his Conscience he is no other than a downright Hypocrite.

On the other side, Let a Man be never so punctual and critical in his Conformity to all the appointed Ceremonies and Usages in our Church, let him constantly attend Gods solemn Worship, and behave himself most reverently and decently at the Publick Prayers, yet if this Man be prophane and intemperate, a Derider of true Piety and Godliness, if he lives loosly and at Random, all his regular Devotions, all his bowing and kneeling to the Honour of our Saviour, all his niceness about his Worship to perform it in the most orderly manner, all his Zeal for the Church shall avail him nothing. He is no better than the Pharisee, washing the out-side, whilst he is within full of all Wickedness and Uncleanness. To be so conderned about little things, whilst we make no Conscience of the greater, is the most evident sign that can be given of a false Christian. And hath it not often hapned in the World, that such a mighty Scrupulosity about our Duty hath proved a very successful way of growing great or raising an Estate, by giving Men so fair an opportunity of imposing upon the credulous and unwary? So that I have known it advised as an useful caution to those that would live in the World, always to stand upon your Guard and look to your Pockets, when you deal with those who pretend to greater Tenderness and Exactness than other undoubtedly sober and honest Christians generally do.

3. Where Persons are truly honest and mean well, there is nothing more troublesom and vexatious than such unreasonable Scruples about things lawful. This must needs be an intolerable disturbance to a Man's Mind, and breed great Anxiety and Inquietude, when Persons are continually shivering and trembling lest by every thing they do they incur the Divine Displeasure; and it certainly disables a man from performing his necessary Duty. He is likely to make but a slow Progress in his Journey, who instead of going on cheerfully in his way, is frequently at a stand, doubting which Foot he should set forward, or what particular Path he should choose. This robs men, in a great measure, of that Peace and Satisfaction which they might otherwise find in Religion, whilst they are daily perplexing themselves with untying Knots which themselves only have fastned. Scruples about things indifferent, when once we attend to and entertain them, like the Plague of Flies amongst the *Egyptians*, will be constantly buzzing in our Ears, and tormenting us with their Impertinency; till at length we come to distrust every thing, and there is nothing that belongs to ordinary civility, no recreation we can use, no cloaths we can wear, no discourse we can hold with others, no conversation we can maintain, or business which we transact in the World, but we shall raise some trifling Objections or Scruples about it, which will make our Condition continually uneasie and restless. For,

4. These Scruples are infinite and endless: for, being grounded upon some very little and inconsiderable Reason, there is hardly any thing to be done but some small Exceptions may be started against it, which may soon puzzle and confound the more ignorant sort of Christians. Thus he that scruples a Minister's officiating in a white Garment, may easily be brought to doubt of the fitness of his doing it in black, and then he proceeds against any solemn distinct Habit, and at last against the Office of Ministers it

self, and tells you all Gods People are holy, and that all Christians are a Royal Priest-hood, and we have no need of Teachers, for we are all taught of God. From scrupling the Sign of the *Cross* after Baptism, Men have soon come to question Infant Baptism it self: they have at first perchance disliked only some significant Ceremonies in God's Worship, of Humane appointment, but thence they have gone on to deny all outward bodily Reverence, and thought it not expedient to pull off their Hats in Church, then not to do it before Magistrates, at last not at all: and thus by giving place to such little Scruples, they become afraid of speaking, looking, or doing any thing like other Men.

This is notorious amongst us. Those who have taken Offence at some things in our Church and have thereupon separated from us, and associated themselves with a purer Congregation, have soon disliked something amongst them also, and then they would reform themselves farther, and after that refine themselves more still, till at last they have sunk down either into Quakerism, Popery, or Atheism. This doth not only now and then happen in the World, but is the probable effect of embracing and cherishing such Scruples, that men go on scrupling one thing after another, till at length they doubt of every thing.

5. Lastly, This needless scrupling of lawful things hath done unspeakable Mischief to the Church of Christ, especially to the Reformed *Church of England*; a Church reformed according to the most Primitive and Apostolical Pattern, by the best and wisest Rules, in which even by the confession of the soberest and most considerable of our Dissenters nothing is required, as a condition of Communion, that is sinful; yet how is she rent and torn, mangled and divided, how hath she been assaulted, undermined, and in danger to be the second time overthrown upon the account only of Habits and Gestures, and particular Forms, Rites,

Rites, and Modes of Discipline and Worship, with which some Men are not well satisfied or pleased, which they judge might be better done and ordered another way, or which they rather would have left at liberty, that every Man may do therein according to his own Discretion or Opinion.

In the great and necessary Truths of Religion we all profess to be agreed. We all worship the same God, believe in the same Lord and Saviour, have the same Baptism, the same Faith, the same Hope, the same common Interest, our Sacraments, as to the main are rightly administred according to our Saviours Institution, our Churches are acknowledged to be true Churches of *Jesus Christ*: but there are some Constitutions, which respect chiefly outward Order and the decent performance of Divine Worship, against which men have received strange Prejudices, on the account of them have raised a mighty noise and clamour against the Church, and have openly separated from its Communion, as if by renouncing of Popery we had only exchanged one idolatrous Service for another. About these skirts and borders, the dress and circumstances of Religion hath been all our quarrelling and contention; and these Differences have proceeded to such an height, as to beget immortal Feuds and Animosities, to break and crumble us into little Parties and Fractions, whereby mutual Edification his hindred, our common Religion suffers Reproach, the Enemies of it are strengthned and encouraged, publick Peace endangered, and brotherly Love, the Badge of Christ's Disciples, quite lost amongst us: and the continuance of these miserable Distractions amongst us upon such frivolous Accounts, (if compared with the Interests of Peace and Charity) is a matter of sad consideration to all lively Members of Christ's Body, and forebodes great evils impendent over our Church and State. I doubt not to say, that the Devil hath fought more successfully against Reli-

gion under the mask of a zealous Reformer, than under any other disguise whatever.

The grand Enemy of mankind hath by various ways and means all along contriv'd, and endeavoured to defeat the designs of Heaven for the good and happiness of men; and as the divine Wisdom hath in several ages of the World manifested it self for the encouraging and promoting of true Righteousness and Holiness, so hath the Devil always been at work to oppose what he could find most proper for the hindring the good effect of Gods Kindness towards us. When the fullness of time came, by the appearance of the Son of God in the World, he was in a great measure dethroned, his Kingdom overthrown, and the last and most effectual means were used for the recovery of men out of his snare and power. When therefore he perceived that by all the grievous Persecutions he raised against the Church, it spread only so much the faster, that at last the whole Heathen Idolatry fell down before the Cross of Christ; when he was shamefully expelled out of his Temples, and from his Altars, his Oracles silenced, and the Religion of Jesus prevailed every where; He then betook himself to his old Serpentine Arts of dissimulation. Since he could no longer oppose Christs Kingdom by open war, he resolved to turn Christian, and to set up for Christs Deputy, and substitute here on Earth, to fight against Christians under Christs Banner, and by adulterating and corrupting the Christian Doctrine, to spoil it of all its Efficacy, to introduce his old Heathen Rites and Idolatrous Ceremonies, as unwritten traditions from Christ himself or his Apostles, and so under his Name and pretended Authority to exercise all that cruelty, oppression, and fraud, which is so pleasing to his own infernal nature, hoping to burn, destroy, root out all true Christians from the face of the Earth, under colour of propagating the Catholick Faith, and inlarging Christs Kingdom in the World.

When *Chriſtendom* had long groaned under this miſerable Tyranny, it pleaſed God in many places of *Europe*, but eſpecially here in *England*, to ſet on foot a Reformation of Religion, which was happily and peaceably accompliſhed among us by the favour and countenance of publick Authority and the wiſe Counſel and Advice of our Reverend Biſhops and other Miniſters. To nip this in the Bud the Devil raiſed that ſharp Perſecution in Queen *Mary*'s days, in which our firſt Reformers glorioufly ſealed what they had done with their Blood: but this proving ineffectual, that he might the better fruſtrate the ends of our Reformation, himſelf would turn Reformer too; A great cry was ſoon raiſed againſt our Church, as not ſufficiently purged from Popery, our Biſhops, our Prayers, our Ceremonies were all Antichriſtian, and it was not long before all Miniſters, Tythes, Temples, and the Univerſities too, were condemned as ſuch, and God knows they had well nigh reformed away all Learning, true Religion, and Worſhip of God, and under the ſpecious Pretence of paring off all Superfluities, had grievouſly ſhaken the Foundations of Chriſtianity it ſelf; inſomuch, that it came to paſs, as ſome of thoſe who now diſſent from us did then complain, That *Profeſſors of Religion did openly oppoſe and deride almoſt all that Service of God out of Conſcience, which other men uſed to do out of Prophaneneſs.* And what infinite miſchief this rath and intemperate Zeal for reforming abuſes and corruptions hath done to our Church and Nation, if the experience of this laſt age will not ſufficiently convince men, it is not to be hoped that any Diſcourſe ſhould. We little conſider whoſe Intereſt we thus ſerve and promote: we do his work who is moſt delighted with Srife and Confuſion, and every one can tell who that is, and where he reigns. To be ſure by theſe uncharitable Separations we highly gratifie the common Enemy, whoſe great Deſign and Policy it hath all along been, by the Follies and in-

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vincible Scruples of Protestant Dissenters to weaken, and by degrees pull down the *Church of England*, and then we all become an become an easie Prey to *Rome*.

If any now tell me, that to prevent this great Mischief and Danger that ariseth from our Divisions, it is not so necessary that the People should lay down their Scruples, (which they cannot well do, since no one can at any time think or believe as he will,) as it is that the Impositions themselves, the matters scrupled at, should be removed and taken away, and then Peace and Unity may be better secured. To this I only answer these two things.

1. I now consider things as they at present stand amongst us. We have a Church setled and established by Law, in which nothing that is sinful is enjoyned. What the Duty of our Governours and Superiours is, how far they may or ought to condescend to the Weakness or Scruples of others, I shall not take upon me to determine; that is another Question which belongs not to us. But I consider now only what private Members of such a Church are to do, and then I say, scrupling the Use of some things prescribed by the Church, will not justifie our leaving it; nay, as I shall shew afterwards, it is our best and safest course to submit and comply with such Orders notwithstanding our Scruples. But I add,

2. If this were a sufficient Reason why the Constitution of any Church should be altered, because some things are scrupled in it, there never could be a setled Church as long as the World stands: for, since there will be always a difference in Mens Understandings and Tempers, some weak and injudicious, others peevish and proud, there will consequently be many that shall scruple and be offended at the best and most innocent Constitutions. And if the Ceremonies now in use amongst us had not been retained at our first Reformation, those very Persons, who are now so much dissatisfied with the Imposition of them, would perhaps

haps have been the firſt that ſhould have then complained of the want of them. Of which we have this notorious and undeniable Evidence in the late times, when our Church was laid in the Duſt, when none of thoſe Ceremonies or Forms which are now objected againſt were impoſed or commonly uſed, yet even then were men gathering Congregations out of Congregations, purifying and reforming ſtill further; Scruples encreaſed, Sects and Diviſions upon them multiplied, and never ſuch Diſtractions and Confuſions in Religion as in thoſe days, and without the gift of Prophecy one may foretell that, if what is principally found fault with in our Church was now aboliſhed, yet thoſe that are given to Scruples would at leaſt in time find cavilling Objections againſt any Conſtitution that can be made. They are like Men given to ſue and go to Law. They never want ſome pretence to diſturb themſelves and their Neighbours.

Men may talk of reconciling our Differences, and making up our Breaches to their Lives end, and propound their ſeveral Projects, and frame their Models, and conceive fine deſigns of Union and Accommodation, yet none of theſe will have any effect or do any good, till men learn Humility and Modeſty, and be contented to be governed by others in things indifferent, till Self-conceit and Pride be in ſome meaſure rooted out, and when this is effectually done, there will then be found but little need of any alteration in the preſent Conſtitution.

The foundation of our Peace and Agreement muſt be laid in the reforming our ſelves and our own Tempers. The way to unite us lieth not ſo much in amending the preſent Eſtabliſhment, Government, Liturgy, endeavouring to add to it, or leave out of it, till all Parties amongſt us are ſatisfied, (which indeed can never be effected) as it doth conſiſt in our becoming more truly Chriſtian in our Lives and Tempers. They are our vicious Diſpoſitions, more

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than our different Apprehenſions, that keep us at ſuch a diſtance. Let the terms of Communion with the Church be what they will, yet as long as Men retain the ſame quarrelſom Mind, and induſtriouſly ſeek for Doubts and Scruples, and are glad to find them, and prefer their own private Opinion and Judgment before the Wiſdom and Authority of all their Governours, whether Civil or Eccleſiaſtical, it is plain our Diviſions and Animoſities will not, cannot ceaſe.

But this leads me to the laſt thing I deſign'd to diſcourſe of; which was, to propound to you the beſt ways and means by which men may get rid of and eaſe their Minds of ſuch Scruples; where I ſhall eſpecially conſider thoſe that relate to our communicating with our Pariſh-Churches. You muſt not expect that I ſhould deſcend to, and anſwer the particular Exceptions which hinder men from conſtant Communion with us; but only in general I ſhall crave leave to adviſe you ſome few things, which would mightily tend to the removing thoſe Doubts and Scruples that yet detain ſo many in a ſtate of utter Separation from us, or at leaſt diſcourage their total and hearty joyning with us. Which charitable Deſign and Attempt, however unſucceſsful I may be in it, yet cannot, I hope, be unacceptable to any, whoſe Conſciences are peſter'd with ſuch Scruples, ſince I endeavour only to deliver them from thoſe Miſtakes, which beſide the diſſervice they do to Religion and the Proteſtant Intereſt, do alſo expoſe them to trouble and danger from the Publick Laws and Civil Magiſtrate. Of many Rules that might be given in this caſe, I ſhall inſiſt only on theſe following.

1. We ſhould take great care to beget and cheriſh in our Minds the moſt high, and worthy, and honourable Thoughts of God Almighty. This is the Foundation of all Religion; and as our Apprehenſions of God are, ſuch for the moſt part will be his Worſhip and Service. Accordingly

ly as we conceive of his Nature, ſo ſhall we judge what things are moſt pleaſing to him, as alſo what they are that are moſt offenſive and diſtaſtful to him.

Now conſider, I beſeech you, Can that Man have becoming and excellent Thoughts of the Divine Nature, who imagines that God regards any particular Geſtures, Habits, and Poſtures ſo far, as that the acceptance of our Service and Worſhip ſhould depend upon ſuch Circumſtances of our religious Actions? When with all Humility and true Devotion of Heart a ſincere Chriſtian proſtrates himſelf at the Throne of God's Grace, and with earneſt Deſire and Affections begs thoſe good things that are according to Gods Mind and Will, Can we believe that the Father of our Spirits ſhall refuſe and reject his Petition becauſe it is delivered in a certain preſcribed form of Words? Shall his importunate renewed Requeſts fail of Succeſs becauſe he ſtill uſeth the ſame Expreſſions, and reads his Prayers out of a Book? Is God pleaſed with variety of Words? or the copiouſneſs of our Invention, or the elegancy of our Phraſe and Stile? Is it not the Heart and inward frame of Spirit that God principally reſpects in all our Prayers? Or can we think ſo meanly of God, that he ſhould ſhut his ears againſt the united Prayers of his People, becauſe offended at the colour of the Garment in which the Miniſter officiates?

Suppoſe two Perſons, both with equal Preparation, with true Repentance and Faith to approach the Lord's Table; one of them out of a deep ſenſe of his Unworthineſs to receive ſo great Bleſſings, and out of a grateful acknowledgment of the Benefits therein conferr'd upon him, takes the Sacrament upon his Knees, in the humbleſt Poſture; the other ſitting or ſtanding. Can you think that the Sacrament is effectual or beneficial, or that God bleſſes it only to him that ſits, or that it would not have been of the ſame advantage to him if he alſo had received it kneeling? To ſurmiſe any ſuch thing, is ſurely to diſhonour God, as if

he were a low poor humourſome Being, like a Father that ſhould diſinherit his Child tho in all Reſpects moſt dutiful to him, and every way deſerving his greateſt Kindneſs, only becauſe he did not like his Complexion, or the colour of his Hair. The wiſer and greater any Perſon is to whom we addreſs our ſelves, the leſs he will ſtand upon little Punctilio's.

Under the Jewiſh Law the minuteſt circumſtances of Worſhip were exactly deſcribed and determined by God himſelf, and it was not ordinarily lawful for the People at all to vary from them. But it was neceſſary then that it ſhould be thus: becauſe the Jewiſh Worſhip was typical of what was to come hereafter, and thoſe many nice Obſervances that were appointed were not commanded for themſelves, as if there were any excellency in them, but they were ſhadows of things to come, which are all now done away by the Goſpel, and the bringing in of everlaſting Righteouſneſs, the only thing always pleaſing to God and agreeable to his Nature: It is a ſpiritual rational Service God now expects from us, and delights in, and he muſt look upon God as a very fond and captious Being, who can perſwade himſelf that our Prayers and Thanſgivings and other Acts of Worſhip, tho we be moſt hearty and devout in them, yet ſhall be rejected by him only becauſe of ſome particular Habits or Geſtures we uſed, which were neither diſhonourable to God, nor unſuitable to the nature of thoſe religious Performances.

Such mean Thoughts of God are the true ground of all Superſtition, when we think to court and pleaſe him by making great Conſcience about little things; and ſo it hath been truly obſerved, that there is far more Superſtition in conſcientious abſtaining from that which God hath no where forbid, than there is in doing that which God hath not commanded. A man may certainly do what God hath not commanded, and yet never think to flatter God by it,

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nor place any Religion in it, but he may do it only out of obedience to his Superiours, for outward Order and Decency, for which end our Ceremonies are appointed, and ſo there is no Superſtition in them. But now a man cannout out of Conſcience refuſe to do what God hath not forbid, and is by lawful Authority required of him, but he muſt think to pleaſe God by ſuch abſtaining: and in this conceit of pleaſing or humouring God by indifferent things, conſiſts the true Spirit of Superſtition. Have great and honourable Thoughts of God, and behold, *all theſe things will be clean to you.*

2, (Which is the particular Rule of my Text) Lay out your great care and zeal about the neceſſary and ſubſtantial duties of Religion, and this will make you leſs concerned about things of an inferiour and indifferent Nature. As on the one hand our fierce Diſputes and Debates about little things and circumſtances are apt to eat out the Heart and Life of Religion, ſo on the other ſide, minding thoſe things moſt, in which the Power of Religion doth conſiſt, is the beſt way to cure our Scrupulouſneſs about little things. This was the Apoſtle's Advice to the *Romans*, *cap.* 14. amongſt whom eating or not eating ſome Meats, obſerving or not obſerving ſome days, had occaſioned as much trouble and Scruple as forms of Prayer and Ceremonies do now amongſt us, *ver.* 17. *The Kingdom of God is not Meat or Drink, but Righteouſneſs, Peace, and Joy in the Holy Ghoſt.* What needs all this Stir and Buſtle? This cenſuring, diſputing, and dividing about Standing or Kneeling, theſe are not the great matters of our Faith; they are not worth ſo much Noiſe and Contention. The great ſtreſs and weight in our Religion is laid upon the Duties of a righteous and holy Life, and a peaceable Spirit and Converſation, and then he adds, *ver.* 18. *For he that in theſe things ſerveth Chriſt is acceptable to God and approved of Men.*

Thus when you betake your ſelves to your Prayers, let it be your greateſt care to fix in your Minds a due ſenſe of God's Infinite Majeſty, of your own Vileneſs and Unworthineſs, of your manifold Wants and Neceſſities, and the greatneſs and goodneſs of the things you petition for, and his readineſs to grant them upon your humble Requeſt; and the more you do this, the leſs ſollicitous you will be about the form or words of your Prayers. He that minds thoſe things moſt on which the efficacy of his Prayers for Chriſt's ſake doth depend, will not ſtand in need of, nor require new Phraſes every time to ſtir his Attention or to raiſe his Affection. Thus let Men be very diligent and conſcientious in preparing themſelves for the Holy Communion; let them come thereunto with lively apprehenſions of Chriſts Love in dying for us, with hearty Reſolutions of Amendment, and true Charity towards all Men; the more concerned they are about theſe neceſſary things, the leſs afraid will they be of offending God by kneeling at the Adminiſtration, or coming up to receive it in one part of the Church rather than another: for, they will find that they are quite other things in which true Religion conſiſts, in a new Nature, in a divine temper of Mind, in the conſtant Practiſe of Holineſs, Righteouſneſs, and Charity; which make a Man really better, and more like unto God.

He that places any Religion in not putting off his Hat, or ſitting at the Sacrament, or not ſtanding up at the Creed or Goſpel, as I before ſhew'd you, hath no worthy Thoughts of God; ſo neither hath he any right Notion of Chriſtianity, which conſiſts only in unfeigned Piety towards God, and ſincere Love to our Brother, not in any external Rites or Obſervances, which are in their own Nature variable and mutable, and are different in ſeveral Churches.

3. It would greatly contribute to the removing theſe Scruples which hinder the bleſſed Union of Chriſtians amongſt us, if men were but really willing to receive ſatisfaction. This alone would go half way towards conquering them. But when they are grown fond of and nouriſh their Doubts and Prejudices, and converſe only with thoſe Men, read only thoſe Books, and hear thoſe Diſcourſes which are made of their ſide, which ſerve to heighten and ſtrengthen their Jealouſies and Suſpicions, when they avoid the means of Conviction as dangerous Snares and Temptations, and look upon this tenderneſs or aptneſs to be offended, as a ſign of Grace and extraordinary Conſcientiouſneſs, there can be but little hopes of recovering ſuch Perſons to a right apprehenſion of things. Whereas would they come once to diſtruſt their own Judgments, to ſuppoſe that they may perhaps be all this while miſtaken, would they calmly and patiently hear, faithfully and impartially conſider what is ſaid or wrote againſt them, as eagerly deſire and ſeek for ſatisfaction as Men do for cure of any Diſeaſe they are ſubject unto; would they, I ſay, thus diligently uſe all fit means and helps for the removal of their Scruples, before they troubled the Church of Chriſt with them, it would not prove ſo very difficult a Task to convince and ſettle ſuch teachable Minds.

If therefore any Man be poſſeſſed with Doubts or Scruples againſt any thing practiſed or required in our Church, let him firſt read ſome of thoſe excellent Books, that are written with all the fairneſs and evidence imaginable, on purpoſe to explain and juſtifie thoſe things that are moſt uſually excepted againſt; let him conſult with ſome of our Church before he leaves it. Let him honeſtly repair to the Miniſter of his Pariſh, or ſome other whom he hath in greater eſtimation, and ingeniouſly open his Mind to him, declaring what it is he moſt ſtumbles at, and hear what can be offered for the Reſolution of his Doubts. If conſulting

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with one Perſon will not do it, let him adviſe with others, and try this often, before he condemns us, and divides from us. Would men do this ſeriouſly, with earneſt deſire of inſtruction, without doubt we ſhould have far fewer Separatiſts, and they who after this did ſtill diſſent from us, would be far more excuſable in it, than otherwiſe they are, and this is no other than what men ordinarily do in their temporal affairs. When they have any fear or ſuſpition about their worldly concerns, they preſently repair to thoſe who are beſt skill'd, and moſt able to reſolve them, and in their judgment and determination they commonly acquieſce and ſatisfie themſelves. Hath any man a ſcruple about his Eſtate, whether it be firmly ſetled, or he hath a true legal Title to it? The way he takes for ſatisfaction is to adviſe with Lawyers, the moſt eminent for Knowledge and Honeſty in their profeſſion. If they agree in the ſame opinion, this is the greateſt aſſurance he can have that it is right and ſafe. Thus is it with one that doubts whether ſuch a cuſtom or practiſe be for his health, the opinion of known and experienced Phyſitians is the only proper means to determine him in ſuch a caſe. The reaſon is the ſame here. When any private Chriſtian is troubled and perplexed with fears and ſcruples that concern his Duty, or the Worſhip of God, he ought in the firſt place to have recourſe to the Publick Guides and Miniſters of Religion, who are appointed by God, and are beſt fitted to direct and conduct him; I ſay, to come to them, not only to diſpute and argue with them, and pertly to oppoſe them, but with all modeſty to propound their doubts, meekly to hearken to and receive Inſtruction, humbly begging of God to open their Underſtandings that they may ſee and embraſe the truth, taking great care that no evil affection, love of a Party or carnal intereſt influence or byaſs their Judgments.

Who do not by this deſire men to pin their faith upon the Prieſts Sleeve, or to put out their own eyes that they might

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be better guided and managed by them; but only diligently to attend to their Reaſons and Arguments, and to give ſome due regard and deference to their Authority: for it is not ſo abſurd, as may by ſome be imagined, for the Common People to take upon truſt from their lawful Teachers, what they are not competent Judges of themſelves.

But the difficulty here is, how ſhall a private Chriſtian govern himſelf, when the very Guides and Miniſters of Religion determine differently concerning theſe matters in queſtion amongſt us? Some warranting and allowing them, others as much diſapproving and condemning them: by what Rule ſhall he chooſe his Guide? To which I briefly reply;

1. As for thoſe who ſcruple at Conformity, and are tolerably to judge for themſelves, let not ſuch relye barely upon the Authority either of the one or the other. All we deſire of them is, that they would equally hear both ſides, that they would think that the Miniſters of the Church of *England* have ſome Senſe and Conſcience too as well as other Men, and are able to ſay ſomewhat for what they do themſelves, or require of others; that laying aſide all Prejudices, Favour to or admiration of Mens Perſons, they would weigh and conſider the Arguments that may be propounded to them, being diffident of their own Apprehenſions, and indifferent to either part of the Queſtion; that they would think it no ſhame to change their Mind when they ſee good reaſon for it. Could we thus prevail with the People diligently to examine the Merits of the cauſe, our Church would every day gain more Ground amongſt all wiſe Men: for we care not how much Knowledge and Underſtanding our People have, ſo they be but humble and modeſt with it, nor do we deſire Men to become our Proſelytes any further than we give them good Scripture and Reaſon for it.

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2. But as for thoſe who are not ſo capable of examining or judging for themſelves (as few of the common People who ſeparate from us really are ; they not being able to give any tolerable account of their diſſent from us, only in general Words declaiming againſt Popery, Superſtition, Antichriſtian and Unſcriptural Ceremonies, Humane Traditions, *&c.*) ſuch had better truſt to and depend on thoſe Miniſters, of known Sufficiency for their Office, who are regularly and by the Laws of the Land ſet over them, than any other Guides or Teachers that they can chooſe for themſelves. This to be ſure is the ſafer courſe, which in doubtful caſes is always to be taken. I ſpeak now of theſe preſent Controverſies about Forms and Ceremonies ſo hotly agitated amongſt us, which are above the Sphere of common People, out of their profeſſion; not of ſuch things as concern the Salvation of all men, which are plain and evident to the meaneſt Capacities. When therefore in ſuch caſes, about which we cannot eaſily ſatisfie our ſelves, we follow the Advice of the publickly authorized Guides and Preachers of Religion, if they chance to miſlead us, we have ſomething to ſay or apologize for our ſelves. Our Error is more excuſable and pardonable, as being occaſion'd by thoſe, to whoſe Judgment, by God's Command, we did owe a great Reſpect and Submiſſion. But when we chooſe Inſtructors and Counſellors to our ſelves according to our own fancy and liking, and they teach us contrary to the Doctrine of our lawful Miniſters, if then we prove to be in the wrong, and are betray'd into Sin, we may thank our own Wantonneſs for it, and are more ſeverely accomptable for ſuch Miſtakes.

Thus let a man that is troubled with any threatning diſeaſe, apply himſelf rather to the Licenſed Phiſicians or Chirurgions, of approved Skill and Honeſty ; and if he chance to miſcarry under them, yet he hath this contentment, that he uſed the beſt and wiſeſt means for his Health and Recovery

very. But if he leaves them all, and will hearken only to *Quacks* and *Empiricks*, tho they advise him quite contrary to what the others prescribed, if under their hands he grows worse and worse, he must then charge his own perverse Folly or idle Humour, as the cause of his Ruine.

4. In order to the curing of our Scruples we should thoroughly understand and consider, what is the true Notion of lawful, and how it differs from what is necessary, and from what is sinful. That is necessary or our Duty which God hath expresly commanded, that is sinful which God hath forbid; that is lawful which God hath not by any Law obliging us either commanded or forbid: for, *Where there is no Law*, saith the Apostle, *there is no Transgression*, *Rom.* 4. 15. There can be no Transgression, but either omitting what the Law commands, or doing what the Law forbids. For instance, If any man can shew where kneeling at the Sacrament is forbid in Scripture, where sitting is required; where praying by a form is forbid, and extemporary Prayers are enjoyned, then indeed the Dispute would soon be at an end: but if neither the one, nor the other can be found, as most certainly they cannot, then kneeling at the Sacrament, and reading Prayers out of a Book, must be reckoned amongst things lawful. And then there is no need of scrupling them, because they may be done without Sin: nay, where they are required by our Superiours, it is our duty to submit to them, because it is our Duty to obey them in all lawful things.

This way of arguing is very plain and convincing, and cannot be evaded but by giving another Notion of Lawful. And therefore it is commonly said, that nothing is lawful, especially in the Worship of God, which God himself hath not prescribed and appointed, or that hath been abused to evil Purposes. And on these two Mistakes are chiefly grounded Mens Scruples about indifferent Rites and Ceremonies in God's Worship.

1. That only is ſaid to be lawful in God's Worſhip which he himſelf hath preſcribed and appointed; ſo that this is thought exception ſufficient againſt the Forms and Uſages of our Church, that though they are not forbid, yet they are no where commanded in Scripture. *Who hath required theſe things at your hands?*

Now here I only ask, Where our Saviour or his Apoſtles have forbid us doing any thing in God's Worſhip, which is not by himſelf commanded, or where in the New Teſtament we are told, that God will be angry with us for doing any thing which he hath no where forbid, either by general or particular Laws? For unleſs this can be ſhewn, there can be no colour for this Pretence, and we are ſufficiently ſure, that no ſuch place can be produced out of the Bible. It is acknowledged by all, that the Holy Scriptures, as to all that is neceſſary to be believed or done in order to Salvation, as to all the eſſential and ſubſtantial parts of Divine Worſhip, is a plain and perfect Rule; but it is as certain that the outward circumſtances of Time, Place, Habit, and Geſture, are not determined in the New Teſtament, as they were by *Moſes*'s Law: and yet God cannot be, at leaſt viſibly and publickly, worſhipped without them. If therefore theſe be not determined in Scripture, and it is unlawful to do any thing in Gods Worſhip but what is ſo determined, it follows that God cannot be worſhipped at all, unleſs we could worſhip him in no Time, Place, Habit, or Geſture: nor indeed can I learn how a Chriſtian can, with a good Conſcience, perform any part of God's Worſhip, if this Principle be admitted for true, that whatſoever is not commanded is forbid, ſince the external Circumſtances of religious Actions, without which they cannot be performed, are not preſcribed or determined in Scripture; and ſo he muſt commit a Sin every time he prays or receives the Holy Sacrament.

Beſides,

Beſides, this Reaſon would oblige us to ſeparate from all the Churches that ever were or are in the World, there being no conſtituted Church in which there are not ſome Orders and Injunctions for the regulating the publick Worſhip of God no where commanded in Scripture. We could never, upon this Principle, have held Communion with the Primitive Churches, which undoubtedly had their inſtituted ſignificant Ceremonies; nor is there any Church at this day, that hath not by its own Authority determined ſome of the circumſtances of Divine Service for the more decent and orderly performance thereof. Nay, thoſe very Perſons that make this Exception, do themſelves practiſe many things in the Worſhip of God, without the leaſt ſhadow of a Divine Command, to which they oblige their Hearers and Communicants: for, conceived Prayers, ſitting at the Euchariſt, ſprinkling the Infant at Baptiſm, the Miniſter's officiating in a black Cloak or Coat, are full out as unſcriptural, humane, uncommanded as any Geſture, Habit, or Form uſed in our Church.

2. That is ſaid to be unlawful which hath been abuſed to ſinful Purpoſes, to Idolatry or Superſtition; ſo that nothing ought to be retained in our Worſhip, tho it be not forbid by God, which was uſed in times of Popery. Hence the ordinary Objection againſt our Pariſh Churches is, that they are not ſufficiently purged from Popery; that our firſt Reformers were indeed excellent and worthy Perſons for the Times they lived in; that what they did was very commendable and a good Beginning, but they were forced to comply with the neceſſities of the Age, which would not bear a compleat Reformation. They left a great deal of *Popiſh* Traſh in the Church, hoping by degrees to reconcile the Papiſts to it, or at leaſt that they might not make the Breach too wide, and too much prejudice or eſtrange them from it. But we now live under better means, have greater Light and Knowledge, and ſo a fur-

ther and more perfect Amendment is now neceſſary. Thus the Order of Biſhops is decried as Popiſh and Antichriſtian, our Liturgy as taken out of the Maſs Book, and our Ceremonies as Relicks of Idolatry.

But the truth of the caſe is this. We muſt conſider, that thoſe of the Church of *Rome* do hold and maintain all the Eſſentials of Chriſtianity, but then by degrees, as they found opportunity, they have added a number of impious and pernicious Doctrines to the Chriſtian Faith, the Belief and Profeſſion of which they equally require of all that are in their Communion. Beſides this, they have introduced ſeveral idolatrous and ſuperſtitious Rites and Practiſes into the Service of their Church, never heard of for the firſt four hundred Years, by which they have miſerably defaced and corrupted the Worſhip of God, and made it neceſſary for all thoſe that love their own Salvation, to ſeparate from them. Now our firſt Reformers here in *England* did not go about to invent a new Species of Government, to deviſe new Rites and Ceremonies, and a new form of Worſhip, ſuch as ſhould be leaſt excepted againſt, and then obtrude it upon this Nation, as was done at *Geneva*, and ſome other places; but they wiſely conſidered, that if they did but reject what the *Romaniſts* had added to the Faith and Worſhip of Chriſtians, lay aſide their novel Inventions, Uſurpations, and unwritten Traditions, there would remain the pure, ſimple, Primitive Chriſtianity, ſuch as it was before the *Roman* Church was thus degenerated: nor have we any thing of Popery left amongſt us, but what the Papiſts had left amongſt them of Primitive Religion and Worſhip.

As we muſt not receive the evil for the ſake of the good, ſo neither muſt we reject the good for the ſake of the evil. In our Church we pray neither to Saints nor Angels, nor the Virgin *Mary*, our Liturgy is in a known Tongue, we deny the Laity no part of the Sacrament, nor the reading of

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the Scriptures, we offer no Mass sacrifice, nor worship Images or the consecrated Bread. We have not one Doctrine or Ceremony in use amongst us, that is purely Popish. But we must be obliged to part with the most sacred, venerable and usefullest things in our Religion, if this be a sufficient reason of our forbearing any thing, because the Papists abuse it.

This therefore I conclude to be the best and plainest rule for the governing of our Consciences, not wilfully to omit any thing that God hath commanded, to avoid to the utmost of our Power what God hath forbid; and what ever else we have no particular Divine Law about, to guide our selves by the general rules of Scripture, the commands of our Superiours, and by the measures of Prudence, Peace, and Charity. This one rule (and it cannot but seem a very reasonable one) would soon put an end to our squabbles and janglings about Forms and Ceremonies and other indifferent things.

5. In order to the bringing men to a complyance with the Laws of our Church, we must desire them to consider that there never was nor ever will be any publick Constitution, that will be every way unexceptionable. The best policy, whether Civil or Ecclesiastical, that can be established will have some flaws and defects, which must be borne and tolerated. Some inconveniences will in process of time arise, that never could be foreseen or provided against; and to make alteration upon every emergent difficulty may be often of worse consequence, than the evil we pretend to cure by it. Let the rules and modes of Government, Discipline, publick Worship, be most exact and blameless, yet there will be faults in Governours and Ministers as long as they are but men. We must not expect in this World a Church without Spot or Wrinkle, that consists only of Saints, in which nothing can be found amiss; especially by those who lye at the catch and wait for an advantage against it.

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If men will ſcruple and reform, as long as any thing remaineth which they can object againſt, they muſt e'en come at laſt, as a Reverend Perſon of our Church hath obſerved, to the ſtate of that miſerable Man who left all humane Society that he might not be defiled with other Mens Sins, and at laſt cut out the Contents of Chapters and Titles of Books out of the Bible, becauſe they were humane Inventions added to the pure Word of God. Men muſt be willing, if ever they would promote Peace and Unity, to put candid Conſtructions and favourable Interpretations upon things, to take them by the beſt handle, and not ſtrain things on purpoſe that they might cavil the more plauſibly, and raiſe more conſiderable Objections againſt them. We muſt not make perſonal, accidental Faults, nor any thing a pretence for our leaving the Communion of our Church, which ariſeth only from the neceſſary condition and temper of all humane Affairs, that nothing here is abſolutely perfect.

6. And laſtly, If you cannot by theſe, and other the like conſiderations, not now to be mentioned, get rid of, and conquer your Scruples, then be adviſed to lay them aſide, to throw them out of your Minds as dangerous Temptations, and act poſitively againſt them.

But here I eaſily imagine ſome ready preſently to ask me, Do you perſwade us to conform to the Orders of the Church tho we are not ſatisfied in our Minds concerning them? I anſwer, That I think this the beſt Advice that can be given to ſuch ſcrupulous Perſons. It would be an endleſs infinite thing, and Communion with any Church would be altogether unpracticable, if every private Chriſtian was obliged to ſuſpend joyning himſelf to it, till he was perfectly ſatisfied about the reaſonableneſs and expediency of all that was required, or was in uſe in that Church: for indeed, private Perſons are by no means proper Judges of what is fit and convenient in the Adminiſtration of Church-

Church-Government, Diſcipline, or publick Worſhip, no more than they are of matters of State, or the Reaſonableneſs of all Civil Laws. Common People generally have neither Patience to conſider, nor Judgment to weigh all circumſtances, nor Wiſdom to chooſe that which is beſt; theſe things of a Publick Nature belong only to our Superiours and Governours, and if they appoint what is unfit, indecent, or inconvenient, they only are accountable for it. It is not the fault of thoſe that joyn with ſuch worſhip, or yield to ſuch Injunctions (not plainly ſinful) for the ſake of Peace and Order.

I know therefore no better Rule for the directing and quieting Mens Conſciences than this, that as to all ſuch matters as relate to Publick Order and decent Adminiſtration of Gods Worſhip, they ſhould without any ſuperſtitious fearfulneſs comply with the Cuſtoms of the Church they live in, never troubling themſelves, nor curiouſly examining what is beſt and fitteſt, as long as there is nothing enjoyned or done, which (after due enquiry) appears to us contrary to any Law of God. Thus St. *Auguſtin* directs us in that often quoted place, where he tells us, *He knew no better courſe for a ſerious prudent Chriſtian to take, in matters of Rites and Cuſtoms, than to follow the Churches example where he is: for whatſoever is preſcribed neither againſt Faith or Manners, is a matter in its ſelf indifferent, and to be obſerved according to the Cuſtom of thoſe he lives among.* This was agreeable to the Counſel St. *Ambroſe*, Biſhop of *Milan*, gave him when he was ſent by his Mother to enquire his Judgment about the Saturday Faſt, *When I am at Rome*, ſaith the Biſhop, *I faſt on the Sabbath, but at* Milan *I do not. So thou likewiſe, when thou comeſt to any Church, obſerve its Cuſtom, if thou wouldeſt neither be an offence to them, nor have them be ſo to thee.* Which St. *Auguſtin* ever after looked upon as an *Oracle from Heaven.*

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I do not by this encourage Men to venture blindfold on Sin, or to neglect any reaſonable care of their Actions; but if People raiſe all the Difficulties and Objections they can ſtart, before they proceed to a Reſolution about things that have no manifeſt Impiety in them, nor are plainly nor by any eaſie conſequence, contrary to the revealed Will of God, this cannot but occaſion infinite Perplexity and Trouble to Mens Minds, and there are but few things they ſhall be able to do with a ſafe and quiet Conſcience. Should all thoſe that have ſome little Arguments againſt the Sign of the Croſs, puzzle themſelves with the Objections uſually urged againſt Infant Baptiſm, and defer baptizing their Children till they were fully ſatisfied about it, I doubt not but the baptizing of Infants would ſoon be as much ſcrupled at as the croſſing them now is. But there is no apparent Evil in it; it is the Practiſe of the Church we live in, it is no where forbid in Scripture: this ordinarily is ſufficient warrant for what we do.

Before we ſeparate from a Church, or refuſe to comply with its Orders, we ought to be fully ſatisfied and perſuaded of the unlawfulneſs of what is required, that it is forbid by God; becauſe by leaving the Communion of any Church, we paſs Sentence upon and condemn it, which ought not to be done upon light and doubtful Cauſes: but there is not the ſame neceſſity that we ſhould be thus fully ſatisfied about our Conformity to all things preſcribed by the Church. We may preſume them to be innocent, unleſs they plainly appear to us otherwiſe.

The Judicious and Learned Biſhop *Sanderſon* thus expreſſeth it in his fourth Sermon *Ad Clerum*, *The Law taketh every Man for a good Man and true, till his Truth and Honeſty be legally diſproved: and as our Saviour ſometimes ſaid, He that is not againſt us is for us: ſo in theſe matters (he ſpeaks of thoſe Ceremonies that for Orders ſake, and to add the greater Solemnity to ſacred Actions, are appointed in the Church)*

Church) we are to believe all things to be lawful for us to do, which cannot be ſhewn by good Evidence either of Scripture or Reaſon to be unlawful.

If any one be afraid that this Principle once imbibed would introduce Popery, make People greedily ſwallow, and without any Examination ſubmit to every thing their Superiours pleaſe to impoſe upon them, let him only conſider (which we all agree in) that there are many things in the *Popiſh* Worſhip and Religion manifeſtly evil, and forbidden by the revealed Will of God, which renders our Separation from them neceſſary, and ſo conſequently juſtifiable: whereas the things objected againſt in our Church are at worſt only doubtful and ſuſpicious, or rather not ſo good and expedient as might be deviſed: and this ſurely makes a wide difference in the caſe.

But doth not St. *Paul* ſay, *Rom.* 14. 19. *I know and am perſwaded by the Lord Jeſus, that there is nothing unclean of it ſelf, but to him that eſteemeth any thing unclean it is unclean?* Doth not he expreſly tell us, *That whatſoever is not of Faith is Sin?* that is, Whatever we do without a full Perſuaſion of the lawfulneſs of it, tho it be not ſo in it ſelf, yet is a Sin in him that doth it againſt his Conſcience. And doth not the Apoſtle ſay, *He that doubteth is damned if he eat*, before he is convinced that it may be done? I deſire here therefore only to be rightly underſtood, and then theſe things are ſoon reconciled.

1. When I ſpeak of a Scrupulous Conſcience I ſuppoſe the Perſon tolerably well perſwaded of the lawfulneſs of what is to be done, but yet he doth not like or approve of it, he hath ſome little Reaſons and Exceptions againſt it, it is not the beſt and fitteſt, all things conſidered. This is properly a Scruple, and is certainly the caſe of all thoſe, who do ſometimes (to ſave themſelves from the ſeverity of the Laws) joyn in our Worſhip, and communicate with us; which we preſume they would never do did they

judge it absolutely sinful and forbidden by God. So that though it should be granted that a man cannot innocently do that of which his Conscience doubts whether it be lawfull or not, yet a Man may, and in some cases is bound to do that which is not unlawful, though upon some other Accounts he scruples the doing of it.

2. If the Question be about things wherein we are left wholly to our selves, and at liberty, having no very weighty Reason for the doing of them, then it may be the safest way to forbear all such things we scruple at. Of such cases the Apostle speaks in the fore-mentioned Places, of eating or not eating some Meats; neither of them was required by any law. Eating was no instance of Duty, or was it any ways forbid: where to do or not to do is perfectly at our own choice; it is best for a Man to forbear doing that of which he hath some suspicion, tho he be not sure that it is sinful. As suppose a man have Scruples in his Mind about playing at Cards and Dice, or going to see Stage-Plays, or puting out his Money to Usury, because there is no great Reason or Necessity for any of these things, and to be sure they may be innocently forborn without any Detriment to our selves or others; though we do not judge them absolutely sinful, yet it is safest for him who cannot satisfie himself concerning the Goodness and Fitness of them, wholly to deny himself the use of them. But in these two cases it is most for the quiet of our Consciences, to act against or notwithstanding our Fears and Scruples, when either our Superiours, to whom we owe Obedience, have interposed their Commands, or when by it we prevent some great Evil or Mischief.

1. When our Superiours, ether Civil or Ecclesiastical, whom by the Will of God we are bound to obey in all lawful things, have interposed their Commands, our Scruples will not excuse or justifie our Disobedience. If indeed

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we judge what is commanded to be abſolutely unlawful, tho it be a falſe erroneous Judgment, yet whilſt we are under ſuch perſuaſion we are by no means to do it upon any Inducement whatever.

If I only doubt of the lawfulneſs of any particular Action, and it be an inſtance wherein I am at liberty, I am ſtill bound not to do it. For, *Whatſoever is not of Faith is Sin.* I am certainly innocent when I forbear; I may commit a Sin, if I do it, Wiſdom would therefore, that the ſafer part be choſen. But now if I am by the command of my Superiours obliged to it, my choice is then determined, it then becomes my Duty, and it can never be ſafe or adviſable to neglect a plain Duty for an uncertain Offence. Thus moſt and beſt *Caſuiſts* do determine about a doubtful Conſcience, particularly the forenamed reverend Biſhop, in the ſame Sermon, *Whatſoever is commanded us by thoſe whom God hath ſet over us, either in Church, Commonwealth, or Family* (quod tamen non ſit certum diſplicere Deo, *ſaith St.* Bernard) *which is not evidently contrary to the Law and Will of God, ought to be of us received and obeyed no otherwiſe than as if God himſelf had commanded it, becauſe God himſelf hath commanded us to obey the Higher Powers and to ſubmit our ſelves to their Ordinances.*

But now this is more plain concerning Fears and Scruples only about the conveniency and expediency of things, theſe ought all to be deſpiſed when they come in Competition with the Duty of Obedience. Would men but think themſelves in Conſcience bound to pay the ſame Duty and reſpect to the Judgment and Authority of Magiſtrates and Governours, whether in Church or State, as they do expect their Servants and Children ſhould to themſelves, they would ſoon ſee the reaſonableneſs of ſuch ſubmiſſion. For all Government and Subjection would be very precarious and arbitrary, if every one that did not approve of a Law

or was not fully ſatisfied about the reaſonableneſs of it was thereby exempted from all Obligations to obey it. This is to give the Supreme Authority to the moſt humourſom or perverſe ſort of Chriſtians: for according to this principle, no publick Laws and Conſtitutions can be valid and binding, unleſs every ſcrupulous, tho a very ignorant Conſcience, conſent to them.

2. We are not to mind or ſtand upon our Scruples, when they probably occaſion a great evil, a general miſchief. They are not fit to be put in the balance with the Peace of the Church and Unity of Chriſtians. Suppoſe for once that our publick way of Worſhip is not the beſt that can be diviſed, that many things might be amended in our Liturgy, that we could invent a more agreeable Eſtabliſhment than this preſent is (which yet no man in the World can ever tell, for we cannot know all the inconveniences of any Alteration, till it comes to be tryed) yet granting all this, it cannot be thought ſo intolerable an Evil as contempt of Gods Solemn Worſhip, dividing into Sects and Parties, living in Debate, Contention, and Separation from one another. If there be ſome Rites and Cuſtoms amongſt us not wiſely choſen or determined, ſome Ceremonies againſt which juſt Exceptions may be made, yet to forſake the Communion of ſuch a true Church of Jeſus Chriſt, and ſet up a diſtinct Altar in oppoſition to it, to combine and aſſociate into ſeparate Congregations, is (as it is ſomewhere expreſſed) *like knocking a man on the head becauſe his Teeth are rotten, or his Nails too long.* How much more agreeable is it to the Chriſtian Temper, to be willing to ſacrifice all ſuch Doubts and Scruples to the Intereſts of publick Order and divine Charity; for better ſurely it is to ſerve God in a defective imperfect manner, to bear with many Diſorders and Faults, than to break the Bond of Peace and brotherly Communion.

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For this we have the example of our Bleſſed Lord and Saviour, who lived and died in Communion with a Church where there were far greater Corruptions both as to Perſons and Practiſes, than can be pretended to be in ours at this day; yet though he was the great Reformer of mankind, he forſook not the Jewiſh Church, but aſſembled with them in their Publick Synagogues, which anſwer to our Pariſh-Churches, preached in the Temple tho they had made it a Den of Thieves, obſerved their Feſtivals, tho ſome of them of humane Inſtitution, nay commanded his Diſciples to continue to hear the *Scribes* and *Phariſees*, tho they were a moſt vile and wretched Generation of Men. Great were the Pollutions and Miſdemeanours in the Churches of *Rome*, *Corinth*, *Galatia*, yet no one Member of them is ever commanded to come out or ſeparate from thoſe Churches to joyn in a purer Congregation or to avoid mixt Communions, or for better Edification. For men to be drunk at the Sacrament was certainly a worſe Fault than to kneel at it, or for a wicked Man to intrude himſelf; yet the Apoſtle doth not adviſe any to withdraw from that Church, but only every one to examine himſelf. We ought to do all that we can do without ſining, ſubmit to an hundred things which are againſt our Mind or we had rather let alone, for the ſake of Peace and Unity, ſo deſirable in it ſelf, ſo neceſſary for the Glory of God, the Honour of Religion, for our common Intereſt and Safety, for the Preſervation of what I may, without Vanity, call the beſt Church in the World.

I cannot ſtand now to tell you, how earneſtly this Duty of maintaining Unity amongſt Chriſtians is preſſed in the New Teſtament; how concerned our Bleſſed Maſter was, that all his Diſciples ſhould agree together and live as Brethren; how ſeverely the Holy Apoſtles chid and rebuked

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thoſe that cauſed Diviſions and Strife amongſt Chriſtians, reckoning Schiſm and Contention amongſt the moſt heinous and dangerous Sins. It ſhould make both the Ears (one would think) of ſome amongſt us to tingle, but to hear what Senſe the Primitive Chriſtians had of the ſinfulneſs of ſeparating from and breaking the Communion of Chriſtians, nay, what the old Non-conformiſts here in *England* have ſaid of it, yet remaining in Print, charging the People to be as tender of Church-Diviſion as they were of Drunkenneſs, Whoredom, or any other enormous Crime. And did Men know and conſider the evil of Schiſm, they would not be ſo ready upon every ſlight occaſion to ſplit upon that Rock.

Let us therefore divert our Fears and Scruples upon greater Sins. It is far more certain that cauſleſs Separation from the Communion of Chriſtians is ſinful, than that kneeling at the Sacrament, or praying by a Book is ſuch. Why then have Men ſuch invincible Scruples about one, and none at all about the other? They run headlong into the Separate Aſſemblies, which ſurely are more like to Schiſmatical Conventicles than any thing in our Church is to Idolatry. Let Men be as ſcrupulous and fearful of offending againſt the Chriſtian Laws of Subjection, Peaceableneſs, and Charity, as they are of worſhipping God after an impure manner, and this alone will contribute much to the making up thoſe Breaches which threaten ſudden Ruine to our Church and Nation. I only add here, that in all that I have now ſaid I am not conſcious to my ſelf, that I have uſed any Argument or affirmed any thing, but what many of thoſe very Miniſters, who now diſſent from us, did teach, and maintain, and print too, againſt the *Independents* and other Sectaries that divided from them when they preached in the Pariſh-Churches. And if this was good Doctrine againſt thoſe who ſeparated upon the account of Cor-

Corruptions, for purer Ordinances in thoſe days, I ſee not why it is not as good againſt themſelves, when upon the very ſame Pretences and no other they divide from us now.

The Lord grant that we may all come at laſt to be of one Mind, to live in Peace and Unity, and then the God of Love and Peace ſhall be with us.

FINIS.

Take heed of ſeparating from the Publick Aſſemblies of the Saints. I have found by experience, that all our Church-calamities have ſprung from this root. He that ſeparates from the Publick Worſhip, is like a man tumbling down a Hill, and never leaving till he comes to the bottom of it. I could relate many ſad ſtories of Perſons profeſſing godlineſs, who out of diſlike to our Church-meetings, began at firſt to ſeparate from them, and after many changes and alterations, are turned ſome of them Anabaptiſts, *ſome* Quakers, *ſome* Ranters, *ſome direct* Atheiſts. *But I forbear; you muſt hold Communion with all thoſe Churches with which Chriſt holds Communion. You muſt ſeparate from the ſins of Chriſtians, but not from the Ordinances of Chriſt. Take heed of unchurching the Churches of Chriſt, leſt you prove Schiſmaticks inſtead of being true Chriſtians.*

See M. Edm. Calamy's Godly Man's Ark, *Epiſt. Dedic. to the Pariſh of* Aldermanbury, *Direction* 14th.

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